

# 1 / The Historical Background of European Nihilism

## THE DISSOLUTION OF OLD-EUROPE

THE DISSOLUTION of the religious and moral unity of the Christian Occident began with the German Reformation. Its political tradition was shattered by the French Revolution, which was to be continued by the Russian Revolution, for Bolshevism originated in western Europe, with the Jacobins. The events of 1789, 1848, and 1917 belong to the same movement. Together, the French and the Russian revolutions made a clean sweep of the past. Both mark an epochal incision in European history. Carlyle called the French Revolution the third act of the world's history; for him the whole history of Christianity was but one single epoch in relation to this revolution, the second act after the first of antiquity. He held the opinion that the European race had burst out into anarchy and several "grossly excited" centuries were ahead before the old house would be completely gutted by fire and something new could take its place. In their counterrevolutionary writings, Bonald and De Maistre in France, Burke in England, and Gentz in Germany emphasized no less, each in his own fashion, that Europe faced a crisis. Napoleon's desire was to bridge the chasm opened by the revolution; his great project failed and the revolution of July 1830 made it obvious that the restoration which meanwhile had taken place was but an interlude. Accordingly, one may say that since 1789 Europe has been living in a still unfinished era of revolutions.

In 1830 Niebuhr, the German historian, believed he saw a rising tide of subversion such as the world had seen during the third century: annihilation of wealth, liberty, civilization, and science. Goethe concurred when he prophesied an impending barbarism, even declaring: "We are already right in it." In a conversation in 1829 on Europe's plight, he said that the nineteenth century



was not simply the continuation of the preceding century, but the beginning of a new period. He saw the time coming when God would no longer be glad of this world and "will have to smash up the whole for a renewed creation." He deemed the foundations of bourgeois society and its forms of intercourse destroyed and looked upon Saint-Simon's writings as the clever outline of a thorough overthrow of the existing order. He saw in the modern French novels a "literature of despair," pressing upon the reader the opposite of all that man ought to be told for his own good. "To excel the ugly, the hideous, the cruel, the contemptible along with the whole kinship of the depraved, that is their satanic business." Everything is now "ultra," perpetually "transcendent" in thought as in action:

No one knows himself any longer, no one understands the element in which he moves and works, or the subject which he is treating. Pure simplicity is out of the question; of simpletons we have enough. Young people are excited much too early and then carried away in the whirl of the times. Wealth and rapidity are what the world admires and what everyone strives to attain. Railways, quick mails, steamships, and every possible kind of rapid communications are what the educated world has in view so that it over-educates itself and thereby continues in a state of mediocrity. It is, moreover, the result of universality that a mediocre culture becomes common. . . . This is a century for men with heads on their shoulders, for practical men of quick perceptions who, because they possess a certain adroitness, feel their superiority above the multitude, even though they themselves may not be gifted in the highest degree. . . . We and perhaps a few others will be the last of an epoch which will not soon return.

(Letter to Zelter, 1825)

Burckhardt makes up his mind in 1846. He departs from the political radicalism of his early friends and henceforth restricts himself to the culture of "Old-Europe." According to Burckhardt, some sort of Roman Caesarism with great national wars looming on the horizon was in store for Europe. The state will again become all-powerful on the basis of democratic leveling and thus bid the masses "to shut up." Questions of pure legality have never arisen where movements of whole nations are concerned, but this time it would seem "as though there were no law and no question left at all." This despotism would not be exercised by tenderhearted dynasties, but by military authorities which are able to govern with absolute brutality, scornful of law, material wealth, sovereignty of the people, or even science. Possibly such despotisms will succeed to a great degree and subdue the European world even in an absolutistic sense. The two claws of the pincers, between which



so-called culture will find itself crushed and which have operated since 1840, are the working classes from below and the military hierarchy from above. The result may again be a Roman Empire, after the intervening appearance of several minor successor states.

“Terrible simplificateurs” will come over Old-Europe, and the pattern of all life, even more than now, will be the expediency of thorough-going militarism. Quite unpredictable, however, will be the fate of the working classes: “a fixed and controlled amount of misery, glorified by military advancement and uniforms, begun and finished with a roll of drums, is the logical thing to come.” There can be no question of stopping on this road—and perhaps it will be in Germany that the sovereignty of a militarized state will first mature. “Alas! How much that was dear to the educated man will have to be thrown overboard as spiritual luxury! And how strangely different from what we are will the new generation be. . . . ‘Prepare for death,’ that’s the wisest thing for all of us to do, in all of Central Europe. Everything will change.”

The same thought is found in the writings of Bruno Bauer, a radical disciple of Hegel. He believed that imperialistic dictatorships would dominate Europe and they would decide the question: “Russia or Europe.”

The illusion of the revolution of 1848, that the time had arrived when the members of the historical family of nations, fortified by the new principle of equal rights and self-determination, will constitute themselves independently and cooperate peacefully, this illusion has the same fate as all illusions dating the era of a new freedom from the downfall of existing barriers to personal activity. This illusion cannot but dissolve through the force of a sterner authority. It shares the fate of that other illusion which sees in individualism the result of the last sixty revolutionary years, the solution of all problems, while it is proved daily that it is only a makeshift condition, shaping one side only and riveted by an iron law to its opposite: imperialism and dictatorship.

For the overthrow of the old order of associations and classes deprived the individual of his personal significance as a member of certain corporations, subduing him thus to an extended system of centralization and to the omnipotence of the whole. “Labor is freed but unchained it will aim at a sterner centralization, dragging in with arms of steel all the single human beings that felt well and secure in their former seclusion and forcing them to submit or to die.” Bauer thought that laws would again be passed which, as in the old “military-theological world” before the French Revolution, would keep men under discipline and determine their feeling,



thinking, and wishing according to fixed standards. Still lacking, however, would be the science of historical laws, which could seize upon the mind and the soul of the masses as the old moral order had done. In this respect, the social sciences have not yet caught up with the natural sciences. Between present anarchy and the future shape of government and society, Bauer's contemporaries are unsteady individuals who ask timidly "What now?" and think their dissatisfaction with the present contains the strength of the future.

The question for Bauer is

whether the Germanic world will survive the decline of the old civilization—for nothing is more certain than this decline—or whether the Russian nation alone will determine the new, whether the incipient era will be called Russian, or whether conjointly with Russianism, Germanism too will confer its name upon it. . . . The German and the Russian questions are the only two vital questions of modern Europe. The latter question, however, had already been posed so precisely by Catherine that the reply to it will precede the answer to the other, for it is supported by such a great organization that the power in control of it can set the time to bring matters to a crisis and cut the Gordian knot.

One decade later in France, Proudhon sketched the disintegration of Old-Europe:

Today civilization is truly in a critical stage which has only one historical analogy, the crisis caused by the rise of Christianity. All traditions are used up, all faith is worn out. On the other hand, the new program is neither ready nor has it entered yet the consciousness of the masses. Hence, what I call disintegration. It is the most terrible moment in the life of society. Everything combines in order to sadden people of good will: the prostitution of conscience, the triumph of mediocrity, the confusion of true and false, the betrayal of principles; baseness of passions, negligence of morals, suppression of truth, a prize for lying. I do not delude myself. I do not expect tomorrow the return of liberty, regard for right, public decency, freedom of speech, integrity of the newspapers, morality of the government, good sense of the citizens, and public-mindedness of the plebians—all to be reborn in our country by means of a magician's rod. No, no, I cannot see the end of the decadence: it will not diminish within one or two generations; that is our lot. . . . I shall see the evil only, and shall die in utter darkness, marked by the past with the seal of rejection. . . . Havoc will result and the depression following the blood bath will be terrible. We shan't see the dawn of the new era, we shall struggle by night and it is necessary to prepare for endurance by doing our duty with a minimum of sadness. Let us stand by each other, call out to each other in the dark, and do justice as often as opportunity presents itself.



Again, a decade later, after the Franco-Prussian war, E. Renan's *La Reforme intellectuelle et morale* appeared, while in Germany, Nietzsche was writing his *Meditations*, likewise a diagnosis of the time and an attempt to find a way out. In the third of the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (1874), Europe's plight is described in a tone like Burckhardt's.

From Proudhon, Renan, and Nietzsche the road leads to Georges Sorel, whose books have helped to shape the Fascist movement. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, European historians no longer follow the pattern of progress, but that of decay.

### NIHILISM IN EUROPEAN LITERATURE

IN THE MIDST of frantic progress, of domination and exploitation of the world by means of the new technical inventions, a feeling of aimlessness and a spiritual pessimism cast its shadow upon Europe's finer spirits. During the middle of the century, European literature produced a type of nihilism formerly unknown. Immermann's novel *Die Epigonen* (1830), Gutzkow's *Die Nihilisten* (1853), and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1860) provoked very lively discussions. This nihilism found its most sophisticated expression in Flaubert and Baudelaire.

Having shown up in the *Temptation of St. Anthony* all sorts of current beliefs and superstitions, Flaubert set about to disentangle and analyze the chaos of scientific culture. He made a list of human follies, intended as an ironical glorification of all that had passed as truth. The result of these absurd studies was the novel *Bouvard et Pecuhet*: two Philistines, sincerely striving for their higher education, good natured and men of sense who had been office clerks. They ramble, in their happily acquired country seat, through the entire maze of piled-up knowledge from horticulture, chemistry, and medicine to history, archeology, politics, pedagogy, and philosophy only to return to their copying by making extracts from the books they had perused in vain. The whole work leads to the conclusion that our entire education is inane. Doctrines of age-long standing are expounded and developed in a few lines, then they are disposed of by other doctrines which are arraigned against them, and then with equal precision and passion destroyed in their turn. Page after page, line after line, some new kind of knowledge turns up, but at once another appears to knock the first one down and then it, too, topples over, hit by a third. At the end of the unfinished sketch, Pecuchet draws a gloomy picture, and



Bouvard a rosy one, of the future of European mankind. According to the one, the end of the debased human race, sunk into general depravity, approaches. There are three alternative possibilities: 1) radicalism severs every tie with the past, entailing inhumane despotism; 2) if theistic absolutism should be victorious, liberalism, with which mankind has been imbued since the French Revolution, will perish and a revolutionary change will take place; 3) if the convulsions of 1789 continue, their waves will carry us away and there will no longer be ideals or religion or morality; America will conquer the world. According to the second picture, Europe will be rejuvenated with the aid of Asia, and there will develop undreamt of techniques of communications, U-boats, and balloons; new sciences will be born enabling man to place the powers of the universe at the service of civilization and, when the earth is exhausted, to emigrate to other stars. Together with human wants, evil will cease, and philosophy will become religion.

Baudelaire's intention to compose "The end of the world" dates from the same period. Some fragments of it, entitled *Fusées*, appeared three years after the revolution of February, 1848. Like almost all young intellectuals, Baudelaire had a hand in this revolt against the bourgeois order, eager as he was for revenge and destruction and full of literary excitement. Later, he regretted this ardor of 1848, not from reactionary motives, but because he wished to separate himself even more completely from the exciting social order and to live in solitude and independence. The lowering of culture to a general level of mediocrity foreseen by Goethe, is to Baudelaire a downright Luciferian fall into nothingness, from which only "artificial paradises" can deliver us:

The world is drawing to a close. Only for one reason can it last longer: just because it happens to exist. But how weak a reason is this compared with all that forebodes the contrary, particularly with the question: What is left to the world of man in the future? Supposing it should continue materially, would that be an existence worthy of its name and of the historical dictionary? I do not say the world would fall back into a spectral condition and the odd disorder of South America republics; nor do I say that we should return to primitive savagery and, with a rifle in our arms, hunt for food through the grass-covered ruins of our civilization. No, such adventures would still call for a certain vital energy, an echo from primordial times. We shall furnish a new example of the inexorability of the spiritual and moral laws and shall be their new victims: we *shall perish by the very thing by which we fancy that we live*. Technocracy will americanize us; progress will starve our spirituality so far that nothing of the blood thirsty, frivolous or unnatural dreams of the utopists will be comparable to these positive



facts. I invite any thinking person to show me what is left of life. Religion! It is useless to talk about it, or to look for its remnants; it is a scandal that one takes the trouble even of denying God. Private property! It was—strictly speaking—abolished with the suppression of the right of primogeniture; yet the time will come when mankind like a revengeful cannibal will snatch the last piece from those who rightfully deemed themselves the heirs of revolutions. And even this will not be the worst. . . . Universal ruin will manifest itself not solely or particularly in political institutions or general progress or whatever else might be a proper name for it; it will be seen, above all, in the baseness of hearts. Shall I add that that little left-over of sociability will hardly resist the sweeping brutality, and that the rulers, in order to hold their own and to produce a sham order, will ruthlessly resort to measures which will make us, who already are callous, shudder?

The same picture of the future as that drawn by Flaubert and Baudelaire appears in the Russian criticism of Europe. In 1880, Dostoyevsky, in his *Diary of a Writer*, argues against the Russian enthusiasts for Western culture that, in view of the failure of Europe to solve its own problems and of its imminent terrible collapse, it is ridiculous to demand that the Russians import European institutions in order to catch up with the progress of the West. "The European anthill built up without a church and without Christianity—for everywhere in Europe the church has lost her ideal and has turned into a state—this anthill on a rotten foundation, lacking every universal and absolute, is completely undermined." What good will it do to take over from Europe institutions which will break down there tomorrow—institutions in which the most intelligent Europeans themselves no longer believe, while they are being slavishly copied by Russians as though the comedy of the bourgeois order were the normal form of human society?

Tolstoi, in 1910, the last year of his life, wrote the following piece of radical criticism of the European civilization which was corrupting not only Europe, but also India, Africa, China, and Japan:

The medieval theology, or the Roman corruption of morals, poisoned only their own people, a small part of mankind; today, electricity, railways and telegraphs spoil the whole world. Everyone makes these things his own. He simply cannot help making them his own. Everyone suffers in the same way, is forced to the same extent to change his way of life. All are under the necessity of betraying what is most important for their lives, the understanding of life itself, religion. Machines—to produce what? The telegraph—to despatch what? Books, papers—to spread what kind of news? Railways—to go to whom and to what place? Millions of people herded together and subject to a supreme power—to accomplish what? Hospitals, physicians,



dispensaries in order to prolong life—for what? How easily do individuals as well as whole nations take their own so-called civilization as the true civilization: finishing one's studies, keeping one's nails clean, using the tailor's and the barber's services, travelling abroad and the most civilized man is complete. And with regard to nations: as many railways as possible, academies, industrial works, battleships, forts, newspapers, books, parties, parliaments. Thus the most civilized nation is complete. Enough individuals, therefore, as well as nations can be interested in civilization but not in true enlightenment. The former is easy and meets with approval; the latter requires rigorous efforts and therefore, from the great majority, always meets with nothing but contempt and hatred, for it exposes the lie of civilization.

Further documents of this kind extending up to the present day could easily be added. Nihilism as the disavowal of existing civilization was the only real belief of all truly educated people at the beginning of the twentieth century. Nihilism is not a result of the Great War but, on the contrary, its cause. Most fully aware of all this was the literary circle around the poet Stefan George. In the preface to the third annual issue of the *Yearbook for the Spiritual Movement* (1912), edited by Gundolf and Wolters, we read:

Even the dim eye does not fail to observe the general cheerlessness spreading despite all improvements, alleviations and amusements, provoking the comparison with the late Roman Empire. From the Emperor to the humblest worker everyone feels that it cannot go on in this way. Everyone is willing to admit that, at least for departments not affecting him directly. What sustains is merely the individual's concern for office, goods and chattels. Nobody believes any longer in the foundations of the present state of the world. These pessimistic presentiments and divinations represent the truest feelings of the time and all hopes to build something on nothing have, therefore, the look of despair.

## TURNING POINTS IN EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY

HEGEL MARKS the end of the history of the old European spirit. Being on the historical road of "progress in the consciousness of freedom," the spirit finally attains in Hegel its perfect knowing and being, thus consummating its history in a double sense. In Hegel's system, the history of the spirit comes to its fulfillment [*Voll-endung*], i.e., to its greatest fullness as well as to its final end. The principle of "final" construction underlies not only the closing chapter of phenomenology, the system of the encyclopedia, and the "conclusion" of logic, but also all special kinds



of knowledge. Both the history of the world and most clearly that of the arts end in a state of perfection. According to Hegel's division of the history of philosophy, his own system stands at the end of the third epoch. The first extends from Thales to Proclus and comprises the beginning and the decline of the ancient world. In its culmination in Proclus, the ancient reconciliation between the temporal and celestial world comes to pass. The second epoch extends from the beginning of the Christian era to the Reformation. In it, though on a higher level, the same reconciliation of the finite and the infinite comes to pass again in order to be consummated in the third epoch, in the philosophy from Descartes to Hegel, by the latter. Like Proclus, Hegel has united the world of the Christian Logos with the absolute totality of the concretely organized idea and thus he is the conclusion of all three epochs. With Proclus, the spirit of the world is to be found at a great turning point before the absolute break, i.e., the onset of Christianity into the pagan world. In a letter to Creuzer, Hegel likewise mentions this "tremendous step" due particularly to Proclus as representing the true turning point of the transition from ancient philosophy to Christianity. Now it is again time to take "a similar step."

But what is the consequence of Hegel's consummation of the Christian philosophy? Obviously, that it must be the last step before a new turn, a break with Christianity! Then, indeed, Hegel's consummation is the same as that of Proclus: a "reconciliation of decay." The highest development is simultaneous with the beginning of a decline at a time when "everything is about to dissolve and to strive for something new." To this new era Hegel gave only an indirect expression. He thinks in terms of the remembrance of the past, in the "grey old age of the spirit," and at the same time in the anticipation of a potentially new territory of the spirit, though explicitly leaving aside the knowledge of it. There are a few bare references to America, which since the beginning of the century is held to be the future country of liberty. He envisages the possibility of the spirit of the world emigrating from Europe.

America is thus the country of the future in which in times to come . . . the momentousness of the history of the world shall reveal itself; it is the longed-for country of all those who are tired of the historical arsenal of old Europe. Napoleon is said to have exclaimed: *cette vieille Europe m'ennuie*. . . . However, what has been happening there (in America) is only an echo of the old world and the expression of an alien life; moreover, as a country of the future, it does not concern us here at all.



Similarly, Hegel concludes a reference to the future importance of the Slavic world, understood by him as an intermediate organism in the struggle of Christian Europe with Asia, with the sentence that he does not deal with this complex of data because it has not yet materialized as an independent element in the succession of the forms of the Logos. "Whether this will happen later on, does not interest us here."

Most radical-minded among all Hegelians with regard to Hegel's consummation of history were Marx and Kierkegaard. Both found themselves confronted with the question, how to go further. They answered that a new start can be made not by continuing the course followed to its very end by Hegel, but only by a distinct break with him. Marx achieved this break in the name of social action and Kierkegaard in that of ethical passion. Both saw that Hegel's mediation between reason and reality was without validity. Consequently, they set a "decision" over against his "mediation"—Marx for a new, earthly world and Kierkegaard for the old Christian God. To the *Communist Manifesto* (1847) corresponds Kierkegaard's *The Present Age* (1846). Marx's criticism of the bourgeois-capitalistic world and Kierkegaard's criticism of the bourgeois-Christian world are related to each other as the obverse of a coin is to its reverse.

That Marx demands a political decision concerning the masses and Kierkegaard a religious decision of the individual in his singleness, that Marx philosophizes without God and Kierkegaard before God—these obvious contrasts have a common ground in their falling out with the world and with God. Due to a common opposition to Hegel's "reasonable world," they sever what had been united by him. Marx decided in favor of a humanitarian world, Kierkegaard in favor of a worldless Christianity. They conceive "what exists" as a world defined in terms of goods and money or as an existence permeated by irony and boredom. Hegel's "spirit-realm" turns into a world of labor and despair; his "idea in and for itself" with Marx turns into a "German Ideology," and the "self-delight" of the absolute spirit becomes a "sickness unto death" with Kierkegaard. Hegel's consummation of history signifies for both a "pre-history" before an extensive revolution or an intensive reformation.

Simultaneously with Marx and Kierkegaard, the other radical pupils of Hegel also made this negation of the existing order the basis of their thinking. Stirner took his stand on "nothing." Feuerbach says that one has to be "absolutely negative" in order to be



able to create new things. Bauer demands "feats of nothingness" as the foundation of new worlds.

If these are the three greatest turning points of history, when Socrates gloried in his not-knowing in the face of a theocracy; when Christianity, opposing the imperial powers, set the soul above everything else; when Descartes told us to doubt everything—if these feats of nothingness created new worlds, then the very final and most difficult resolve, namely, to will nothing, nothing of what has been, will give man complete mastery over the world.

The term "nihilism" changes its color from an expression of pessimism and weariness to an active destruction until Nietzsche reveals the European nihilism as a "logic" of decadence, i.e., as the necessary presupposition of a new beginning. By definitely turning the romantic nihilism of weakness into one of strength, Nietzsche drew those extreme conclusions from the experience of the last century which only now prove truly epochal and hold sway over us. He considered the pessimism of the "fin de siècle" merely a "precursive form of nihilism." Thus he set for himself the task of pushing the feeling of inanity and aimlessness of all existence to that extreme point where it should reverse itself into the will to new values.

In the first chapter of his last book, the *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche explains to the world why he represents something decisive and fateful between two millennia, a person on the threshold. He knew himself as both decline and rise, as an end and a beginning. The same ambiguity which marks his existence also marks his concept of Europe. Europe is a world at once perishing and growing. But between these two processes there is no continuous transition, there is only a fateful act of decision. Nietzsche's ultimate goal is the spiritual and political mastery of the European over the globe. In order to force Europe into this "long range policy" [*Grosse Politik*] which is simultaneously a "war of spirits," Europe must overcome its nihilism by becoming ready to form again a decisive and purposive whole, beating out a new order of life. As a hammer for the will to power and life, Nietzsche regarded his doctrine of the eternal recurrence, because it bids man accept his life at every moment as though it would return through all eternity, a doctrine counterbalancing the inanity and aimlessness caused by a disease of the will. The infirmity of the will is at its worst where civilization has longest prevailed, as in France. It decreases as the barbarian still or again asserts his claims under the loose drapery of Western education, as in Russia, which is touched



by European civilization, but only skin-deep. However, the more the threatening attitude of Russia increases, the more will Europe have to decide to become equally threatening by acquiring *one* will by means of a ruling cast that can set its aims thousands of years ahead and drill the democratic masses for this purpose. The time of petty-states is over. The twentieth century, Nietzsche prophesies, will, with the struggle for the dominion of the globe, bring the compulsion to great imperialistic politics. To this end, however, Germany will have to strive in all earnest for an "agreement" with England.

For nobody believes any longer that England herself will be strong enough to keep playing her old role even for fifty more years. . . . Nowadays one must be a soldier first, lest one lose his credit as a merchant. In brief, regarding these as well as other matters, the next century will be seen following in the footsteps of Napoleon, the most outstanding and anticipating personality of modern times.

The standing armies, permanent since the Napoleonic wars, are but the first sign of Europe's new military development.

Personal, virile and physical capacity recovers its value, valuations become more physical, nutrition consists more and more of meat. Beautiful men have once more become possible. Bloodless sneaks are a matter of the past. The savage, (even the wild animal), in every one of us is acknowledged. Precisely on that account, philosophers will have a better chance.

One must meet the alternative of perishing or of gaining a foothold.

A master race can grow up from terrible and violent beginnings only. Problem: where are the barbarians of the twentieth century? Obviously, only after tremendous social crisis will they loom and consolidate themselves. It will be those elements which are capable of the greatest rigor towards themselves and able to vouch for the longest and strongest will.

Nietzsche's faith in the future of Europe lies in its growing "more man-like."

This political program is not to be found on the periphery but at the center of Nietzsche's philosophy. It follows from his analysis of European nihilism and its counter concept of the will, which is to replace the "Thou shalt" of the Christian faith. Europe's fate is, in Nietzsche's consciousness, bound up with himself. An echo and outburst of this will to determine Europe's faith is manifested in the letters from the period of his mental derangement. He invites the European princes (*nota bene*, exclusive of the Hohenzollerns) along with the Pope to a conference to take place in Rome.



But his entire sane production, too—from the *Thoughts out of Season* to the *Antichrist*—is a continuous war on everything that has been believed in, demanded, and sanctioned through two thousand years. As immoralist and “destroyer *par excellence*” he taught that only by destroying could one create, true to the general description of the Germans given by Stirner in his review (1841) of Bauer’s *Posaune* (trumpet):

Only the German and he alone demonstrates the mission of radicalism in the history of the world; he alone is radical and he alone is authentically so. No one is so inexorable and inconsiderate as he; he overturns not only the existing world in order to remain upright himself, he overturns himself, too. Where the German pulls down, a God must fall and a world perish. With the Germans destroying is creating and the destruction of the transient is his eternity.

It is the decline of Christianity and its morals which Nietzsche wants to hasten, for “what is falling, should be pushed down.” The positive element of this will to overthrow the existing order is the will to power as a “revaluation of all values,” the first part of which is (according to a last draft of 1888) the *Antichrist*. Zarathustra is the “victor over God and Nothingness,” namely, the nothingness proceeding from the death of the Christian God. The will of man, now godless, must learn to command itself. For this, the superlative energy of such a will is required. European nihilism, as Nietzsche sees it, is thus first a crisis of Christianity and lastly a decision to will and to create new, pagan Gods. In the meantime, however, the sole temporary truth can only be: “*Nothing is true any longer, everything is permitted.*” That the liberty to everything as well as to nothing is implied in this is “the advantage of our time.” Morality and humanity are being replaced by the will to some aim and thus to its means.

From Napoleon and Bismarck, Nietzsche learned that the democratic leveling of Europe would some day culminate in dictatorial leadership. For “the same new conditions which as a rule will produce equalized and mediocre men, useful, industrious . . . and clever collective beings, are in the highest degree suitable to give rise to exceptional men of the most dangerous and attractive qualities. . . . The democratization of Europe is also an involuntary arrangement for the rearing of tyrants—taking the word in its full sense, even in its most spiritual sense.” Nay, it might even prove for the emancipated masses themselves a kind of redemption and justification, if someone appeared who would use them as means to his ends. “The same conditions which tend to



develop the gregarious animal also force the development of the leader-beast."

Nietzsche's ideas paved the way to the Third Reich. He did not himself walk that way, but like all pathmakers, prepared it for the others. The German *Aufbruch* or awakening, which is supposed to have made nihilism a matter of the past, is indeed the achieved logic of disintegration, a "Revolution of Nihilism" as Rauschnig rightly has called it, though he underestimates the depth of its historical ramifications.